Interview with J. Howard Garnish

.

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J. HOWARD GARNISH

Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt

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Q: This is Lew Schmidt, interviewing Howard Garnish at his home in Alexandria, Virginia, on the 27th of October, 1989. Howard, I'm going to ask you to start out by giving a brief background on where you came from, what your education was, and then go on from there to indicate how it was that you got into the predecessor agency or agencies of US Information Agency. So why don't you pick it up now and start with your background, your education, and we'll begin.

Biosketch: Education and Pre-GovernmentPress Experience

GARNISH: Okay, Lew. I'm an apple knocker and the peculiar accent we come up with is called an apple knocker's twang. I was born in Rochester, New York, was graduated from the University of Rochester with a major in history. Before I had finished college I was working, actually full time, as a reporter on one of the Rochester papers. For the next 16 years I worked either in Rochester or in Buffalo, had all kinds of newspaper jobs, including reporter, feature writer, assistant Sunday editor, Sunday city editor, and copy reader.

One of my early assignments as a reporter was to help cover Charles Lindbergh's stop in Rochester — a part of his triumphal tour of the United States after his solo flight across the Atlantic to Paris in May 1927.

1943: Entrance into OWI in New York; Garnish Heads Military Desk

When the war came along, World War II, I was 4-F, they didn't want me, but I was kind of interested in serving in some fashion, and besides I rather thought I was in a dead-end in the newspaper business. A friend had gone down to New York and had joined OWI. He came back to Buffalo and talked with me a bit and I got interested enough to make a trip down to see if they were interested in me. And they were.

Q: This was 1942?

GARNISH: This was 1943. In fact, I was very discouraged shortly thereafter because only about a week after I started work at the Office of War Information (OWI) in New York, the Italians surrendered and I was sure the war was over. It wasn't quite, as you know.

I was assigned temporarily to the Military Desk of OWI's Basic News Unit with the original idea that I was going overseas, probably to Australia. But the chief of the Military Desk resigned and I got tapped for the job, although Dick Montague, who was a hell of a good man, was the first in line. He refused it because he hated administrative detail. We operated there on three eight-hour shifts a day, six days a week. As chief of the Military Desk, I had to take my swings — day, evening and overnight — so you never knew when you were going to get your sleep or if.

OWI's Detailed Maps of Soviet Union Enables OWI to Report on Russian Front with Consistently More Accuracy than News Services

One of the interesting things in the OWI experience, I think, was the coverage of the Russian front. We had a professor from City College of New York, Gene Golomstock.

In Russian it was Evgeni. And Gene did a marvelous job of getting detailed maps of the Russian front. Incidentally, since he had Sundays off, I frequently had to handle that job of following the map on Sundays, so I had to learn the Russian alphabet.

Q: Tell me, what languages were you broadcasting in at this time?

GARNISH: We weren't — VOA, which was part of the operation there, was broadcasting in — I don't know how many — maybe 26 languages.

Q: What were you specifically doing then?

GARNISH: We were providing the raw material. We were writing news accounts of the operations, feature stories and backgrounders, which were important because, while the news accounts handled things from day to day, they gave very little idea of the overall development of the war. That was one of our jobs which was extremely important.

Q: So you were not doing any of the voicing, you were doing the backgrounders and —.

GARNISH: We were doing the writing. Right. But the strange thing is, when the Burma Road was finally opened, for example, an Indian paper — and India is lying next to Burma — an Indian paper picked up our whole backgrounder and ran it in full.OWI's Basic News Unit, and particularly the Military Desk, had tremendous resources. We received all the American, British and French wire services and could use their output as we saw fit. We had a great library, manned 24 hours a day. We enjoyed frequent briefings by experts, such as John Fairbanks, an “old China hand.” And we received guidance on what to use and what not to use. For example, we withheld our knowledge about radar for months, until the Germans became aware of it.

Our output was transmitted by voice, by wireless, by cable, and by mail. The Burma Road backgrounder, for instance, was a mailer which I wrote about two months before the road

was opened, enabling our side to reduce the supply flights over “the Hump” to Vinegar Joe Stilwell and the Chinese Nationalists working out of Kunming, in southwest China.

One of the things we had to do was to keep our language desks in line, because they would see a UP or INS story, whatever, particularly about the Russian front and say, well, they made a 40-mile advance. And here's where Gene Golomstock and his maps came in. We had some detailed maps that nobody else in the news operation had; certainly nobody in London, and all the correspondents were filing out of London at that time. Of course, the Russians did not permit any of the Western correspondents to follow their troops as the Allied troops did in the West.

Q: Who was the maker of those maps? How did you get hold of them? I know you said your assistant had gotten them, but where did he get them? Who had them?

GARNISH: One, he got them from the archives, libraries, government offices. Also, he traded some of them off with the New York Times, for example. He'd get something that they didn't have and they'd give us something we didn't have. He would spend his days bouncing around town, picking up maps, and his evenings in the office.

Now as I said, the important thing about these maps was that they were in extreme detail, and in the Russian language. We had them blown up so that you could follow a battle line. And the Russians did provide a north to south record of their battle line in their communiques. We discovered that immediately.

Q: These were being picked up by shortwave broadcast? If they were giving their communiques — where were you getting their communiques?

GARNISH: Their communiques were recorded in London and then forwarded to us. But the problem was that the London correspondents did not have the detailed maps. It was no fault of theirs; they did the best they could with what they had. We had better resources, that's all. And we, for example, maybe the French desk or one of the others

would come to us and say, hey, you guys are saying they made a two-mile advance and the AP is saying they made a 40-mile advance. What about this? This was after Stalingrad when the Russians were moving back to the West. Well, the “what about it” was that the Soviet Union had more Novy Mirs, for example, than we have, let's say Washingtons; I guess there are 30 or more of them in the 50 states.

It was a very natural thing that the maps available in London showed only a pretty-big-sized Novy Mir, if we can use that as an example, and our map showed that the one the Soviet communiques mentioned was a little town right in line with the rest of their battle line. So we had to educate all the language desks that you had to go with our stuff, not London's.

The fascinating thing about this occurred, eventually, when the siege of Leningrad was broken. If you'll remember, Leningrad was cut off for 880 days — almost 2-1/2 years — with little food or fuel. It was a city of misery and death. From day to day in January 1944, the Soviet communiques showed their armies moving away from Leningrad, pushing the Germans away both to the east, west and southward. This was a true pincers movement to the south of Leningrad. Finally one night Gene came to me in great excitement and blurted, “Hawvie, Hawvie” (”Howie,” with his accent), “They've got a big German army surrounded.” Well, we had spent a great part of the war trying to convince our language desks that armies weren't trapped, as some news accounts claimed, and here we had a trap and nobody else had it. I said, “It sure looks like it.” We went over the map very carefully two or three times and here was a Russian line on the west, here was a Russian line on the east, and they had finally met in the south. But in between, between there and Leningrad, there was no claim of having taken any of those towns. So I said, “Gene, I guess we've got it, let's go with it.” And we gave this news to our language desks and it was duly broadcast.

Q: The reason I'm about to ask this question is that these days the Voice has a rule that they will never broadcast a news item unless they get confirmation from at least two

points. And one of their confirmation points is almost invariably one of the wire services. You apparently didn't have that requirement in those days in the OWI broadcasting.

GARNISH: No, because, for one thing, we were ahead of the wire services; we had more accurate material than they did. They frequently had to backtrack on their stories and we didn't. This is not to downgrade them, because they did the best they could with what they had at the time.

At any rate, we went with it. I said, “I suppose the second communique — the Soviets always put out an early communique around 5 in the afternoon and a late one, their midnight communique. And I said, “I suppose that they'll have this in their midnight communique with all kinds of salutes and orders of the day,” because that was the way they handled their big victories. Well, the midnight communique came along and there was no mention whatever of this. It made me a little nervous. The next day we were still carrying the story. We looked for it in the early communique. Nothing. The midnight communique. Nothing. And the third day, the early communique came in. Nothing. I said, “Gene, if we don't get a confirmation on this in the next communique, we're going to have to backtrack like hell.” We went over the maps again and again and again and we couldn't find anything wrong with our mapwork.

Well, along came the midnight communique that third day with “orders of the day” from Stalin himself. This was a huge, huge victory. And we had beat the others by three days. That was a very gratifying moment.

Q: It sure would be.

GARNISH: Of course, we had all kinds of headaches with that Russian front. But worst of all was the fighting down in Yugoslavia — Serbia — because you could hardly ever make head or tail of that. One reason: We didn't have good maps. Another reason: The forces of

Mikhailovic and Tito often fought each other more than they fought the Germans and their reports and claims sometimes didn't explain who the enemy was.

The Military Desk kept careful files on air losses on both sides and wrote weekly summaries and backgrounders, explaining the significance of air strikes, as well as daily reports.

After the Normandy landings on June 6, 1944, we had a lively time covering the eventual breakout from Normandy, the liberation of Paris and the progress of forces led by Bradley, Patton, Montgomery, etc., across the Rhine and all the way to Czechoslovakia and the Elbe River. Meanwhile, when the Germans made their desperate counterattack — the Battle of the Bulge — we reported our setbacks as well as our final victory. That kind of honest reporting gave us credibility and thus, I believe, hastened the German surrender.

Well, so much, I guess, for that.

With the end of fighting in Europe, we turned our full focus on the Far East. I was sent to Forth Worth for a preview of the B-32 bomber, my story to be on a “hold-for-release” basis. In hindsight, I am convinced that the B-32 was built to carry the atomic bomb, but it saw little or no action because events overtook its delivery. But my trip was not in vain: Texas had plenty of big, juicy steaks which in the East were scarce and cost plenty of rationing coupons.

Meanwhile, American fighting ships were winning sea battles and General Douglas MacArthur eventually made good his “I shall return” promise to the Philippines. Dick Montague and I used to collaborate on what we called a Pacificer, explaining the war in the Pacific and showing the significance of MacArthur's leaps from island to island and so on.

1946: Garnish Goes Temporarily to Jobas UN Editor for VOA

At the end of the war I was assigned temporarily to a features desk and then was tapped for the job of United Nations editor. So I went from war to peace in a hurry.

Q: What year was this that you went to the UN?

GARNISH: March 1946. Originally, there were just two of us handling this, Bill Clark and I. The UN had not yet had its buildings built in New York. Rockefeller had given the space on Turtle Bay but that was about the extent of it. They were just beginning to put things together. In the meanwhile, the first meeting of the Security Council in New York — they had met in San Francisco, of course, to draft the charter the year before, and then in London. But the first meeting in New York was at Hunter College, where the gymnasium was converted to a meeting hall, and our office was in a broom closet under the stairs. By that time we had some Voice people, besides the writers, and I think at one time we had nine people in this tiny space, with typewriters, a teletype and so forth.

Q: You mentioned Bill Clark. Was this the Bill Clark who subsequently was head of the European area for USIA or was this —?

GARNISH: No, it was another Bill Clark. This Bill Clark came from southern New York. He came originally from Dakota. We were still at Hunter College when the Soviets walked out and made it possible for the Western powers to establish the assistance to Iran that prevented the Russians from taking that over.

Then somewhat later, the Atomic Energy Commission was born and Bernard Baruch was our representative. That first session was held in the Henry Hudson hotel in downtown New York on 57th, over in the West End. And we were on hand then to cover his rather famous statement that atomic energy faced us with the choice between the quick and the dead.

Q: You mentioned that you were covering all this material at the UN and I had neglected up to this point to ask you for whom. For whom were you covering?

GARNISH: Our VOA job was broadened somewhat. We were not only covering for the Voice and the Wireless File, but also for the UN itself. In its early days the UN did not have its own radio operation and so the United States offered to provide the UN with a means of communicating with the world. And so, for example, in those sessions of the Atomic Energy Commission, Bill and I did a running account of the meetings and passed our copy to David Penn, who was broadcasting, right there in a booth next to us. This continued for quite a while.

1948: Covering UN General AssemblyMeetings in Paris for USIE State/VOA

In 1948 the General Assembly building had not yet been constructed. In fact it still wasn't constructed in '51. In 1948 the General Assembly was to be held in Paris, so I was assigned to cover that session at the Palais de Chaillot, along with a Washington chap. The two-man operation included everything from writing for both VOA and the Wireless File to doing taped interviews with various people, most particularly Eleanor Roosevelt, who was a member of the United States delegation.

I was sent over to Paris a week ahead of time to set up communications. Today this wouldn't have been necessary, but in those days communications were far different. I had to negotiate to see what kind of deal we could make with various communications companies and finally made one with Press Wireless. And we continued to use Press Wireless for many years in connection with our various overseas assignments.

Side Bar: On a Weekend Off Garnish Rides Airlift

Plane Into Berlin With Near Disastrous Consequences

During that assembly, I managed to get a weekend off in November, and had the opportunity to take the airlift into Berlin, which was in itself a very fascinating experience. As it happened, it was darned near fatal. Perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself, because one of the experiences in Berlin that weekend was to see the reaction of the Germans when the airlift was not operating because of bad weather. I remember that Saturday night we were at some function and the weather had closed in. It was miserable. And you could actually see the German people looking up and listening for the sound of airplanes, because this was their lifeline. We were among the first correspondents to be allowed into Berlin on the airlift. Until then the planes were always trying to make up a shortage of food and fuel.

As I started to say, on the trip back we left Berlin on a C-47 in beautiful weather. We had a magnificent sunset. We were traveling empty, of course, so another correspondent and I sat with earphones on, hearing all the palaver between the pilot and his various checkpoints. When we got over Frankfurt, which was the home base of this particular plane, we got into the stack above there. The weather had closed in terribly. You couldn't see the wingtips, so everything was being operated from the ground. We worked our way down the stack at 500-foot intervals until we were in the second level — just the level before landing — when the tower told us to get out of the stack; radar showed three planes at our level and they only allowed two. So the pilot put the nose up and we went zooming up to the top of the stack to do it all over again.

Well, we worked our way down that time until the plane ahead of us, which had been at the same level that we were, was ordered to land. And suddenly the tower called and said, “Get out of the stack, we've lost you.” So the pilot zoomed up again and reported to the tower, “Look, we're running out of fuel, what do we do?” The tower said, “Go over to Wiesbaden.” Wiesbaden was only about 25 miles away. We went over there, found perfectly clear weather, came right in. Since Wiesbaden was not the plane's base, the pilot took the plane up to the operations shack and went in to find out what he was supposed to

do. While he was in there — and we went in, too, to stretch our legs — the flight engineer came rushing in, saying “Captain, Captain, they're loading us with coal.” That is how the airlift was working. If there was an empty plane, bang, it was loaded.

Q: So what did you do? Did you go back to Berlin then?

GARNISH: No, no. We managed to fly back to Paris on another plane and resumed work at the General Assembly.

Oh, I forgot to mention the family. In '48, when I got the instruction to go to Paris, my wife and I got together. We decided that this would probably be the only chance all the family, our two kids, 11 and 8, and we, could see some of Europe. So, although we didn't have much money at the time, we did own a house. We managed to sublet it and got the cheapest transportation for the family that was possible and they followed me in a week.

In the meantime, I was supposed to find accommodations. We had been told that there was no problem getting apartments in Paris; it would be very easy. On the contrary, it was very difficult. The Embassy housing office did its best for us, and I hopped around there after I got the communications set up, but didn't have any luck at all. Towards the end of the week, with the family due in three days, I went again to the housing office. The officer said, “Mr. Garnish, we really don't have anything for you. Of course there's an apartment out in Neuilly but you'd have to share it with a French family.” I said, “That sounds pretty impossible, but I don't have anything else to do today, so I'll go look at it.”

It developed that an American expatriate named George Washington Loop who had been in Paris since World War I, was a friend of the woman who owned this apartment in Neuilly, a Paris suburb. He picked me up, took me out there and served as interpreter, because I hadn't brought along a French dictionary and my French was pretty ragged.

At any rate, I took the place. We were to have the front parlor and living room, and right across the hall was the dining room which they turned into a bedroom for the kids, and

down the dark hall was a bathroom which we shared. This was on the ground floor and they closed up the steel blinds at night. It had no heat, which was typical of many French places at the time, soon after the war. But through the Embassy, I managed twice to get a half-ton of coal for the tiny stove in the fireplace of our combination living room-bedroom and it helped heat the whole apartment.

My family came two or three days later. Meanwhile, I had moved into the apartment. And Lucy Legeard, the French woman who had inherited the place, got to talking to me in French. She spoke not a word of English. She lived there with her niece and nephew, both of them were 20 to 25 years old. The nephew spoke a few words in English but almost nothing. At any rate, my family's arrival was delayed by a general strike, which was quite normal for post-war France. It was not only a strike in Paris, which meant I couldn't get a taxi even to go to the station, so I arranged to get a car from the Embassy. But my family had also been held up at Le Havre, because both the railroad employees and the customs men were doing a slowdown.

So, instead of arriving in the daytime, which they normally would have done, the family arrived in Paris near midnight. On the way from the station to the apartment I told my wife of the arrangement: they were going to have to live with a French family. And it didn't phase her. I then turned to her and said, “What the hell does besoin mean?”

Q: Does what mean?

GARNISH: Besoin. Which in French means need. The reason was that, for the time between my coming to the apartment and picking up the family, Lucy had been coming to me, “Avez-vous besoin de . . .?” over and over again, and I was having a hell of a time figuring out whether I should answer yes or no. Just because I didn't remember that little French word.

Well, we managed very well. In the first place, my wife had had a lot more French in college than I had and she quickly got along with Lucy. They shared a kitchen, but they

had no problems whatever. Years later, in Thailand, the head of the Alliance Fran#aise at a party would take my wife aside and say, “Talk to me in French, you have the most interesting combination of accents I've ever heard.” This was partly because, when we eventually got to Geneva in 1952 we had an Italian maid who spoke French with an Italian accent. And my wife had been speaking with Lucy and, of course, she also had an overlay of American French. But she was fluent and that's what counted. And eventually I picked up a little more French.

1951: Garnish Returns for Second Assembly in Paris

At any rate, in 1951 we had another assembly in Paris, the General Assembly building in New York still not being completed. Again it was held at the Palais de Chaillot. This time the United States government decided that it was important. Instead of sending two men, it sent a big team. We must have had, well, including the French teletype operators and so forth, we must have had about 25 people on the team. It was headed by Hank Arnold. I was in charge of the press reporting. We also had a photo team, motion picture team — some of them came from Austria, some from Washington. Bill Clark came from London, the other Bill Clark.

Q: This is our Bill Clark.

GARNISH: Our Bill Clark. Morrell Cody from Paris was on hand. And we had some people from Germany, including Mickey Boerner. They operated with various groups of correspondents, so that we were not only providing the material for broadcasts and the Wireless File in the United States, we were giving briefings in several languages to the various European and even Asian correspondents who were on hand.

Q: We haven't discussed this while you were talking about your coverages in Paris of the General Assembly, but I'm wondering at that time were you specifically working for VOA,

or were you generally working for what was a predecessor agency of USIA, namely USIE at that time?

GARNISH: Lew, we were working for the State Department. All the information operation until 1953 was a part of State. It was Dulles who separated us in '53. But, yes, I worked for a lot of initials, USIE, IIAA, but basically we did the same job. It didn't matter which outfit we were officially working for, we were still working for the Voice and for the Wireless File.

Q: But where were you based? In Washington or New York?

GARNISH: New York.

Q: Then probably you were on the Voice payroll.

GARNISH: Yes.

Q: Of course the Voice was part of USIE and what later became IIAA, but you were probably on the Voice payroll specifically.

GARNISH: Right. I mentioned the extensive coverage that we gave that assembly. We came back from that assembly and almost immediately Hank Arnold was promoted to Foreign Service Personnel Officer for State. And when I heard of it, I wrote him a little note congratulating him on the promotion. And I said, well, now when you have a nice cushy foreign assignment, let me know. I was just joking. He wasn't. He whipped back an answer almost immediately: “Glad you're interested. I've got things coming up. I'll be in touch.”

1952: Garnish Assigned As PAO in Geneva

We had got back in the winter of 1952 and by October '52 we were headed for Geneva, Switzerland, and I was PAO there.

Q: Were you PAO for Switzerland or were you PAO specifically for the UN operations and the US representation in Geneva?

GARNISH: Yes. Geneva, of course, is not the capital of Switzerland; Bern is. And the country program was operated from Bern. We were part of the US Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, which — when I first got there — had a rather divided leadership. There was a Consul General, Ed Ward, who was responsible for the normal operations of a Consulate General, and Tom Blaisdell headed the contacts with international organizations. I was a split personality, more or less, because, while I still had some responsibility for a normal USIS program in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, I was really sent there because of the emergence of Geneva as an international conference center. And, having come out of covering the United Nations, this was quite normal because Geneva was the European headquarters of the United Nations, while New York was the overall headquarters.

We got to Geneva in October, coming through a snowstorm across the Jura mountains into the city, and we were installed in the Hotel de l'Ecu, which was just across the Rhone River from the Consulate General. The Hotel de l'Ecu no longer exists. But it was an old hotel which had an interesting woman handling most of the affairs for the owner. During the war she had been in charge of a Swiss camp for American internees, that is, the American airmen who were shot down over nearby Germany or France and managed to land in or escape to Switzerland. She still heard from some of them.

There was an old joke about how the Americans flying over Switzerland would be told by the neutral Swiss, “You're over Swiss territory.” And the pilot would say, “Yes, we know it.” And the Swiss would message to them, “You must get out of here or we'll shoot.” They had anti-aircraft batteries set up all over. The American pilots didn't take this very seriously, but the next thing you know, they were being shot at. And the pilot would tell the ground, “Hey, you're shooting low.” And the Swiss would answer, “Yes, we know it.”

We had a tremendous increase in conferences almost immediately after my arrival in Geneva. And, by the way, we had to stay at the Hotel de l'Ecu until February because we were after an apartment owned by a French couple who were preparing to divorce. The woman and her husband were so bitter that she, for example, would arrange for us to visit the place and he would lock up some of the rooms so we couldn't see them. We were about ready to give up on this when it finally was possible to close the deal.

That was a lovely apartment. It stood on the old city wall opposite one of Geneva's many beautiful museums. We had a little garden with a grape arbor at the side of the apartment and a narrow balcony atop the wall, overlooking a bus stop. In due time, our Italian maid brought a little kitten in from an apartment across the street. She named it Michou which, I believe, is sort of a corruption of Chou-Chou, a term of endearment in French. The kitten was supposed to stay with us only for a week while the other people were away, but of course what happened was that we adopted the cat.

My wife went out on the balcony one night, calling for the cat, “Michou, Michou.” And a man at the bus stop down below responded, “I'll be right up, darling!”

We had just got into our apartment in February of 1953 when USIA decided to cut out the whole program in Switzerland. We were treading on eggs for a long while. One Sunday morning I got a call from the Ambassador, Frances Willis, in Bern. She said, “Mr. Garnish, please get up here for lunch. Ned Nordness is coming in and we want to talk about Geneva.” Nordness was then the USIA Area Director for Europe. I scrambled to get the last train possible to get there in time for lunch. But I made it.

1953: Agency Greatly Reduces Swiss Program, Concentrating Most Effort in Geneva and Making Garnish Country PAO

And Frances Willis, whom I regard as a very able ambassador, told Nordness, yes, he could cut out the whole Bern operation except for one local employee who could read the

German press and give her summaries, because she could read the French herself, and all the rest of the operation would be in Geneva, because of the conferences there. I thus became the country PAO by default. And I was allowed to get two employees. It happened that the Consulate General was cutting back, so I was allowed to select any two of their locals and I picked out a very competent secretary, Marthe Perrel, and Ernie Hinnen, who became practically everything. He handled the film program; we brought the films down from Bern, and he was the photographer for conferences and also checked the Wireless File early in the morning. He was a jack of all trades. These two have retired within the last few years. Both of them were great, and both of them have been here on trips to the United States and stayed with us.

Ambassador Willis' sound judgment was confirmed almost immediately, because Geneva became flooded with a series of international conferences which demanded wide dissemination of the United States positions in the course of coverage. Geneva is the headquarters of more than 35 international organizations, including the World Health Organization, the International Labor Organization, the International Telecommunications Union, the World Council of Churches, and on and on to the International Standardization Organization, which seeks agreements on all kinds of things including the standardization of screw threads. That really gets down to the nuts and bolts!

Obviously, coverage of many of these conferences was more than a one-man job, so I headed an accordion-like operation. With USIA assistance, I borrowed manpower as necessary. My principal source was Lem Graves' information team in Paris. It was a holdover from the Marshall Plan and was absorbed by USIA. Its members, Mike O'Mara, Dave Brown, Sandy Sanford, and Lem himself, were sent around Europe as needed to cover NATO, the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Union and whatever else required their coverage. Mike was borrowed so often that eventually the Agency transferred him to my Geneva staff. All of the others were borrowed at various times, and for real big

conferences we had individuals, teams and secretaries from Austria, Yugoslavia, Spain, England, France, Italy and Germany — and maybe I've overlooked some.

In 1949, I had been sent to Geneva as a member of the US delegation to the summer session of the UN Economic and Social Council, because the forced labor issue was high on its agenda and required extensive coverage. Later, when I was PAO, I was named a delegate to many of the sessions. But whether an official delegate or not, I usually sat in on our delegations' morning meetings, so I had access to classified material, US positions and strategy, and could often pick up advanced texts of delegation statements.

Once, Andy Berding, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, phoned from Washington to ask me to substitute for him at a NATO meeting in Brussels. I believe that was the only transocean phone call I received in 16 years of foreign service. How times and communications have changed!

Meanwhile, I had to turnover our USIS in-Switzerland operation to Ernie Hinnen, a local employee. I scrounged films and publications from Paris, in French; from Bonn, in German, and from Rome, in Italian, and Ernie took care of their distribution to the three language areas of Switzerland.

Our conferences in 1953 included a session of the United Nations Commission on Prisoners of War. And here's why Geneva is not your ordinary post: I was named a member of the US delegation, which was headed by Ambassador James Dunn, who came up from Madrid, and included Howard Donovan who was the Consul General in Zurich.

I was appointed, of course, because this was an exercise in public diplomacy, as we call it today, propaganda, if you will. The Commission had been formed in 1950 to try to trace all the World War II prisoners who were still being held in other places, or to account for them if they were dead. Almost all the belligerents had done a pretty good job of exchanging lists and tracing their prisoners. Most of them by 1953 had returned them, the exceptions

being the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, which, incidentally, had taken a big bunch of Red Cross nurses prisoner.

Several countries, but particularly Germany, Japan and Italy, had thousands — well, I think Germany claimed millions — unaccounted for. And from 1950, when the Commission was formed, until 1953, there was no accounting for the prisoners in the Soviet Union and Communist China.

Getting ready for this conference, Donovan and I got together a day or two before Ambassador Dunn's arrival and went over the material we had available. Of course, a lot of stuff had been sent from Washington. Donovan and I looked it all over and were very disappointed. It was all old stuff—not a single thing we could offer as a new development. But we agreed that I would try to put together an arrival statement for Dunn. I sweated over that. As I said, it was just a rehash of old material. And all this time — eight years after the war ended — the Soviet Union had insisted it didn't hold any prisoners of war. They had, I think it was some 13,000 so-called war criminals, but they didn't recognize that they had any prisoners of war and wouldn't account for even the dead.

Donovan and I went over my draft statement carefully, decided that was about the best we could do, and when Ambassador Dunn arrived we showed it to him. He said, “Okay, put it out.” So I took it out to the Palais and made it available to the correspondents.

The strange thing is that, almost immediately, there was a hell of a reaction from the Russians. They had been claiming all this time that they had nobody, but they reacted. It really surprised me because of the staleness of stuff.

Well, to make this short, the Commission met in closed session, but I, being a member of the delegation, could attend the meetings and then I could brief the correspondents, which I did. We got a lot of publicity on it, partly because the Soviet reaction helped build the

story. And soon after our Geneva session, the United Nations General Assembly in New York approved the Commission's report and urged it to continue its good work.

I'm now going to condense this because it goes on and on, but in due time thousands of Japanese, German and Italian prisoners of war were repatriated. It was basically because of the Commission's work, but the fact that I was able to get to the correspondents to keep the story alive and build on the Soviet reaction helped, I think, accomplish the big repatriation.

Q: When they were repatriated, since they were from different corners of the earth, were they all repatriated through Europe? Or were the Japanese repatriated through Siberia and into Japan?

GARNISH: The Japanese Red Cross had set up an arrangement with the Chinese Red Cross, and through them they repatriated several hundred, I've forgotten the exact number. The Red Cross and the Commissioner for Refugees and so on all had a hand in this, but the Commission itself was the central point of operation. And there was also a lot of government-to-government work. The United Kingdom, for example, would send a list to Germany of Germans they had recorded as known dead, the details of their death and burial, and so on. They would indicate which ones they had as war criminals. And the Germans also supplied lists, as much as they could — of course, none of the main countries in Europe had complete lists, it was impossible in wartime.

Q: But anyway, the Japanese prisoners who were released through the Red Cross into Asia, not into Europe?

GARNISH: That's right. In addition to all the regular conferences, Geneva in 1954 and 1955 hosted a series of very high-level sessions. John Foster Dulles, Bedell Smith, Alexis Johnson, Anthony Eden, Pierre Mendes-France, Zhou En-lai, Ho Chi Minh, Molotov and others came in 1954 to tackle the war-related problems of Korea and Indochina. Korea produced sterile propaganda exercises. The other, coming in the wake of the French

defeat by the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu, yielded as many disagreements as agreements. The United States, holding out for United Nations supervision of free elections in Vietnam, didn't sign. And I recall that the final communique was held up until after 4 o'clock in the morning by Prince Norodom Sihanouk's insistence on Cambodia's right to join a defensive alliance. Such an alliance, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), was just emerging, but the unpredictable prince promptly denounced it. And now Sihanouk is back in the news!

In 1955, the United States built a reactor on the grounds of the Palais des Nations for the first Atoms-for-Peace Conference. That conference overlapped the first Summit meeting, at which President Eisenhower conferred with the heads of government of the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and France.

Eisenhower was good copy whatever he did. On July 17, he and Mamie attended the American Church. I happened to be head usher that Sunday, so it fell to me to make arrangements to seat the Secret Service detail in strategic places in the congregation. Across from our headquarters in the Hotel du Rhone was a toy shop. One day the President walked in there and bought a doll for his granddaughter. The story and pictures were carried around the world, as were developments at the Summit.

For those and a few other conferences, our staff swelled to 30 or more, brought from Washington and much of Europe.

Q: I want to backtrack a little bit, and maybe there's nothing to talk about, but the years you've been discussing were in large part the years in which we went through the McCarthy terror. I wondered if that affected you in any way, did you come in contact with any of that very difficult era?

GARNISH: I was very lucky in that respect because from time to time, while I was at the United Nations, I would be drafted when things were relatively quiet there to come in and run the news desk in New York, because they were often shorthanded there. We had a

fellow who did the Latin and Spanish programs who was not a good writer and his idea of a good piece was to keep saying anti-communist, anti-communist, or communist, as the case may be. He wasn't subtle at all in his writing. And so the desk had to do a lot of rewrites of his stuff.

Well, along came the McCarthy business and he went to McCarthy and accused almost everybody, particularly all the slot men, that is, the chief copy editors, in the office, of being communist-inclined because of the editing of his copy. Some of them just up and quit. Some darn good people left because they didn't want to go through this whole rigmarole. And one of them defied the McCarthy committee and got away with it. But I never was brought into it.

I was, however, called upon to evaluate a couple of — well, one of the good writers at USIA, and the principal public affairs man at the US Mission to the United Nations. In both cases, to my mind they were absolutely clean and I said so. But it was a very nasty period.

Q: I guess it was. That was your only direct brush with the McCarthy organization?

GARNISH: Yes, I never got called in. But the Consul General in Geneva was instructed to interview me about my loyalty. I had been a founder and officer of the Newspaper Guild in Buffalo, where we beat off some communist attempts to take over. When I went to OWI in New York I joined the union there. But eventually a communist clique gained ascendancy, so I dropped out because I didn't have the time to fight them. When I was interviewed in Geneva, I was fortunate to find my dues card, showing when I quit paying dues to the OWI union. I presented that, wrote a detailed statement, and heard no more about it.

Q: So you came out of it pretty free, pretty untouched.

GARNISH: I was just lucky, I think, because I happened to be out of the mainstream.

Q: Okay, we can go back to Geneva now. I just wondered if you'd had any experience with that era.

GARNISH: Yes, I had.

I was mentioning Ambassador Willis. One of the jobs I had on the other side of the picture, of course, was to nominate grantees to go to the United States. One of the papers in Lausanne had an editor who took almost every occasion to step on the United States. But I had the feeling that he could be brought around if he learned a little more about us. At that time Bern had as PAO George Freimarck. I talked it over with him and we agreed that the Lausanne editor was a good candidate for a grant. But that had to be approved by the Ambassador, and she read the French press. We presented the case, she said, in effect, no way, he has been giving us all kinds of trouble. We pressed it pretty hard and finally Miss Willis said, “All right, if you can get the DCM and the Political Officer to agree, I'll go along.” And we finally got them to agree. Well, it turned out to be one of the best grants we ever gave, because that guy changed his whole attitude toward the United States.

Q: That's really rather a remarkable case. Ordinarily they think they're being brainwashed and they won't allow themselves to be, so this is one of the real success stories.

GARNISH: It is. We also sent a Geneva editor over, but he had an open mind and we made out pretty well. But then I arranged another grant. The head of the International School in Geneva was a sort of Prussian type, Monsieur Rockette. We thought exposure to the American education system might help him. We managed to get him over. It did help—for about four months. Then he went right back to his old ways. So that was the other side of the story.

1956: Transfer to Stockholm as Country PAO

Late in 1956 Bill Clark, who was then our area director, gave me word that I was being transferred to Stockholm. My departure was delayed because on the day they cleaned

out the apartment I came down with pneumonia. So I got up to Stockholm in January of '57. That was on direct transfer. And it was not the most comfortable situation because I didn't know a word of Swedish and my predecessor, Nils William Olsson, was fluent in the language and was a professorial type. I was fairly fortunate, however, because the staff was excellent. They took me over and we got along quite well.

One of my early jobs there was to speak to the Swedish-American Association. I labored over a text and I must admit that I read most of it to the gathering. It was not a very successful beginning. When it came time for an evaluation, the DCM who did it wrote that he's doing a pretty good job but he sure is not a public speaker. I learned something from it. I've never since written a speech. I've talked but I haven't written a speech. And it works a hell of a lot better.

Q: It always does.

GARNISH: There's a little sidebar to that. In the summer, the Swedish American Association has an open-air affair in a park. Swedes who have gone to the United States and returned flock there by the dozens, if not the hundreds. Well, I was invited to attend that summer, so my wife and I showed up and we were escorted to the front row. I thought that was kind of peculiar, because the Ambassador or DCM ought to be up front. But they didn't show. It turned out that I was the representative of the United States for the occasion.

One after another, Swedes and Swedish-Americans were brought up to the microphone to tell something about their Swedish past or American experience, or whatever. This went on for quite a long time. Suddenly the master of ceremonies says, “We'll now hear from Mr. Garnish.”

Well, one, I hadn't been in Sweden very long. Two, I didn't yet know much about Sweden. But I had to walk down several feet and then take three steps up and then walk back to the middle of the platform. In the meantime, I was thinking, “What the hell am I going

to say?" In desperation, I began, "Well, I was not born in Sweden; my parents weren't born in Sweden; but I have some ancestors who came from Ireland and from England. Now, I've been reading a book titled The Long Ships, by Bengston, and it tells a good deal about how the Vikings (in Sweden they call them the Veekings) spent a great deal of time in England and Ireland. And so, maybe, I have a little association by indirection with Sweden."

Well, this went over. And when we left Sweden, one of the Swedes who came out to the airport to see us off and said, "You know, that was a great speech you made!" Desperation!

We had a very excellent Ambassador when I got there, John Moors Cabot. He was a pro. The Swedish press is pretty rough and something had come up about United Fruit and, of course, the Cabot family had been associated with United Fruit. One of the papers in particular was just giving us hell. Ambassador Cabot called me in and said, "I know you're going to have some problems with this, and I want to tell you the straight story. I don't own a nickel of United Fruit stock, I am out of it completely. My wife owns some and another relative owns some. But you are free to use any information I give you with the press." And fortunately, being able to do that, the story died in a few days.

Cabot was succeeded by Francis White, a political appointee who had been in Mexico before. And White was almost the opposite of Cabot. White came from Maryland. He had a magnificent collection of Revere silver and he thought that what we should do was have a huge exhibit of Revere silver for the Swedes. Well, one, we didn't have the money and, two, I didn't think it was such a hot idea. We managed to bypass that.

But Thanksgiving came along and he was to give a speech somewhere, I've forgotten exactly where, on "What Thanksgiving Means To Me." He instructed me to do a draft of his speech. I worked very hard to find Swedish associations with Thanksgiving, and there are a few. I worked this into a draft and gave it to him. Well, he eventually made the

speech, but not my speech. His speech was how he enjoyed riding to hounds in Maryland on Thanksgiving day.

Q: Is this the same Francis White who was head of the Visa and Passport Office for a long time?

GARNISH: No, no. This is — that was Frances, with an e, she; this was a he.

Q: Oh, this was a he. I see.

GARNISH: Since I had gone on direct transfer, I was overdue for home leave the following summer, the summer of '58, and return to Sweden for two years. We made a circuit of the families and so forth, got back to the New York area, we stayed with some friends in Pelham, because we had lived in Westchester. I communicated with Pan Am and reconfirmed our return flight for the following Monday.

1958: Preparing to Return to Sweden After Home Leave, Garnish Called to Washington, Asked to Accept PAO in Thailand and Does So

On Friday morning before that Monday I got a call from USIA, George Hellyer, who was then the Far East Area Director. The gist of it was, “How would you like to go as PAO to Thailand? We'd like you to consider this thoroughly and give us your affirmative answer by 4 o'clock this afternoon.” I talked with my wife about it and she agreed that we ought to explore it. But we had just got through buying all kinds of heavy clothes for another two years in Sweden. At any rate, I called back and told Hellyer we hadn't yet decided but were interested. He told me to postpone our return to Stockholm and come to Washington for a week.

Meanwhile, I called a friend at the US Mission to the United Nations in New York and asked if they had a post report on Bangkok. He said, “No, but we can get one.” I said, “All right, I'll be in there in an hour.” My wife and I took the train from Pelham. The mission had

got the post report and we spent a couple of hours, I guess, reading and discussing it. One of the things it mentioned was snakes and my wife finally said, “All right, I'll go. But the first snake I see, I'm coming home!”

To jump ahead, it was several months before she saw her first snake. I'd seen a great many in the meantime but I didn't point them out. But one day, when we were playing golf at the Royal Bangkok Sports Club, coming off number 9 we had to walk along the edge of the course where there were a lot of bushes and there, on a bush, was about a three-foot long green snake with a red tail. I'm told they are quite poisonous.

Q: Yes, they are. Those are the — the popular name is a bamboo snake.

GARNISH: Yes.

Q: They are very poisonous.

GARNISH: At any rate, she happened to be in the lead and our caddies were following along. She looks at it, she says, “oh, look at the snake. Kind of pretty, isn't it?”

Long and Complex Story Behind the GarnishAssignment to Thailand

Q: That's a very interesting development, Howard. What made George Hellyer draft you for Bangkok? Was there any particular background on that that you could go into?

GARNISH: Yes, indeed. While I was in Geneva, Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson, who was then the Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, was sent over to Geneva for the ambassadorial-level talks with the Chinese communists. We had just gone through a hell of a lot of conferences and I was beat. So the family and I took off for Germany for a little vacation at Garmisch-Partenkirchen. We arrived at the US military installation, went to the housing office and were assigned to officers' quarters. We got there, a porter took our luggage and led us to the room. He was just setting down the luggage when the phone rang. He

answered it. He said, “Mr. Garnish, it's for you.” I said, “It can't be, nobody knows I'm here.” “Sorry, sir, it's for you.”

So I went to the phone. It was Jack Stuart calling from Munich, where he was stationed. He had got word from Geneva to find me and tell me to get the hell back to Geneva because Johnson was coming in and he wanted me as his press spokesman. So we left and went to Munich, stayed overnight with the Stuarts because we were pooped, and got back to Geneva the next day.

On August 1st, I believe it was, the talks with the ChiComs began. As a spokesman, I was probably the most silent one that was ever created because, almost invariably, what I had to tell the correspondents and post on the bulletin board at the Palais was that they met for so-many minutes or hours, as the case might be, maybe said the atmosphere was friendly or correct or something, and the next meeting would be such and such a date. I just wasn't allowed to say anything more.

At any rate, this went on for a year. The first anniversary of the talks came up and Johnson, who had an office on the floor above mine at the Hotel du Rhone, called me one day, “Come on up.” So I went up. He opened a copy of Time magazine and said, “Did you give them this?” Here was a long story on the anniversary of the talks and it was complete and accurate in practically every detail.

Q: You mean, what had been going on?

GARNISH: Well, sort of summarizing the year's progress. I said, “No, I didn't talk with anybody. Did you?” He said, “No, I haven't.” I said, “Okay, I'll try to find out. I'm on pretty good terms with Time's correspondent, but he has every right in the world to tell me to go to hell.”

So I went out to the Palais, found the correspondent, and I said, “Bob, where the hell did you get that story?” He laughed. He said, “I wondered that, too.” It appears that — and he

showed me his copy — in the previous March he had had a meeting with Johnson where he had picked up some information. And he had filed at the time and Time didn't use it. But they had filed it away and put it together for their anniversary story.

It was important in one respect, because Johnson was very embarrassed about it. He told me that just at the previous meeting the two sides had agreed to say nothing. And now —. Well, being able to explain it to him and he being able to explain it to his Chinese counterpart, Wang Ping-nan, saved the situation.

Q: He, in effect, had been the source of that information?

GARNISH: He had been the source of the information several months before.

Q: And he had not said it was off the record, apparently.

GARNISH: No.

Anyway, to explain how I was drafted for Bangkok: while I was on home leave the situation in Thailand came up and Personnel was having a problem. The Bangkok PAO, Dick McCarthy, who was fluent in Mandarin, was scheduled to be transferred to Taiwan where they had a tense situation because of the Quemoy and Matsu problem, shelling back and forth between the islands and the Communist Chinese coast. The islands were claimed by Taiwan, although they are rather close to Mainland China. A new Ambassador had been appointed to Taiwan and he demanded to have Dick as his PAO, obviously because of his skill in Chinese.

The arrangement was that the PAO in Taiwan was to trade with Dick. It was just fine, but the PAO in Taiwan suddenly resigned.

Q: Who was that, do you know?

GARNISH: I can't recall his name. At any rate, Personnel proposed that Dick's deputy move into the job and Johnson rejected it. They proposed some other names and he rejected those. He was pretty damned annoyed because the deal he had agreed to had fallen through.

So it happened — this is another one of those squirrely things — it happened that Mary Eich, who had been in Bern while I was in Geneva and with whom I had helped set up the budget for the country, was on temporary assignment to the Personnel section in Washington. So in the course of all this, Mary — I don't know whether she said it to Hellyer or somebody else — said, “Howard Garnish is back here on home leave. He worked for Johnson in Geneva. Why don't you try him?” They did. That's how I got to Bangkok. I didn't know the first thing about Southeast Asia except what little I had learned from the Conference on Indochina in 1954. I had no preparation beyond one day of briefing in Washington and what I had been able to pick up from an acquaintance at the United Nations who had once served in Bangkok.

So we landed there and I quickly found out that there was a knife in my back because the deputy had been turned down. He had his coterie, what they called “old school Thais,” who weren't very sympathetic to having a European type come in and start running the show. It took quite a while to bring them around.

Q: What year was this that you went to Bangkok, then?

GARNISH: October '58. In the meantime I had gone back to Stockholm for one month because while we were on home leave they had moved me from one apartment to another. I didn't know where anything was. They had just installed me in a beautiful apartment in Diplomat Hus in Stockholm. We camped there for a month and took off for Bangkok.

Principal Program in Thailand was Rather Conventional, But Even in 1958, A Vietnamese Insurgency Effort was in Progress in NE Thailand, and Part of USIS Effort Was Directed Against It

The Thailand program was more a conventional type USIS program. Well, so was Stockholm, but completely different from Geneva, although I got a little taste of that because UNESCO was then working on information problems in Asia and I was designated as a delegate to some of their conferences. I also was US representative on a SEATO information committee. But aside from the normal operation there, we had a counterinsurgency problem. Laos was having a civil war, Laos lying just on the northeast border. Relations with Cambodia, farther to the east, were poor. The Vietnamese had installed a pretty large contingent in various towns in Northeast Thailand and were busy trying to sell the Thais up there, who had very little association with the government. So our program was devoted in part to convincing the Thais, the upcountry Thais in particular, that they were Thai. Some of them even thought they were Lao. And of course there was a very close association between them.

We used various means to do this. One was to establish what we called mobile information teams, in coordination with the Interior Department of the Thai government. To the extent possible, we tried to make these look like a Thai operation. In the first place, they would be headed by the Thai governor of the particular province we were working on. In the second place, a Thai health officer would go along. We would have one American, that was Bob Lasher, to keep an eye on things and report, which was hard for Bob, who hated to write reports. And we would send up a motion picture team in Land Rovers to show movies. The movies were the big attraction to bring the Thais together. And also, on the main rivers of Thailand we had a boat, a nice top-heavy tub called “The Pickering,” for Jack Pickering, our former Thailand PAO and East Asia Area Director. They would go up in remote places and set up outdoor movie shows. Some of the Thais were so ignorant of

motion pictures that they would actually walk around behind the screen to see what was on the other side.

At any rate, the mobile information teams would go in and make sure that the Thais got a taste of Thailand rather than other countries, through films. Also, the Thai health officer who was very busy at all stops, would undertake to try to treat the various ills that people came up with. He'd spend all afternoon doing this. The governor would make a little speech to help them understand his role and the role of government in Thailand, not just in Bangkok but in the provinces. And, to help them identify with the Thai government and their own religion, we would hand out pictures of the King and the Emerald Buddha, which is revered by most Thais.

Incidentally, one time when I was over at a PAO conference in the Philippines, I went down to the USIA service center in Manila — it was then being run by Jerry Doster — and we worked out an arrangement to have these pictures of the King and the Emerald Buddha encased in plastic. We got them for a very small sum, about a cent apiece, I think. This was very important because the upcountry people almost invariably lived in thatched shacks and the rain would come down the walls and destroy the pictures if they put them on the walls. So, when we put them in plastic, they had something that would last forever, or almost.

We also worked in close association with our AID program, which out there was called USOM, the United States Operations Mission. Our motion picture teams worked with them on projects which the AID operation was doing. For example, they built for Thailand the East-West highway and we made a picture of that. We did a movie on the railroads of Thailand, a very colorful one, incidentally. Our device on things like that was not to emphasize in the talk the United States participation but to work it in sort of under the rug. In the railroads films, for example, we would have the US AID symbol worked into various scenes. But not all the time. We'd be careful not to overdo it.

Filming a Picture With Thai Border Police Combating Smugglers With Live Ammunition — And With The Cooperation of Both Combatants

The filming team in and of itself was a fascinating operation.

Q: Who was your MoPix Officer at that time?

GARNISH: Ralph White was the MoPix Officer and he did a damn good job. And more particularly, he had a very good crew of Filipinos and Thais. There was a young Thai woman who was the producer on a lot of these shows, and one in particular which fascinated me, more than that I guess. They were doing a film on the Thai Border Patrol Police. They wanted to show how the Border Patrol Police were controlling smuggling.

Well, our producer went to the police and outlined what she had in mind. one scene was to show smugglers coming over a trail with their horses, and so on, and the police catching them and fighting them. They'd have a gun battle. She inquired whether part of the police could act as smugglers to do this scene. Well, the Thai police responded, “that's not necessary. We can put you in touch with the smugglers.” And they did.

So she got in touch with the smugglers and the police and outlined how this should go and how they should finally get into a battle, and so on.

Q: Were they firing blanks at one another?

GARNISH: They were supposed to fire blanks at one another. But one of the parties to the thing, while they were still negotiating said, “Why should we fire blanks? We've got lots of live ammunition.” The way it turned out, our cameraman stood out in the open filming the show while the Border Patrol Police and the smugglers were firing live ammunition. If I had known it in advance, I would have vetoed that one, but it came out all right; nobody got hurt.

Q: We're sailing a little bit under false pretenses there, with that show.

GARNISH: Yes. But it showed what the Border Police were supposed to be doing, anyway.

We did quite a bit for the King and Queen. The King, as you know, was very much interested in shows and music, particularly jazz. We had lots of associations with them. And incidentally, Phil Damon, whom you know —

Q: I never met Phil, but know very well about him.

GARNISH: He was the prime mover on this because he had an “in” at the Palace that you couldn't believe. His wife, Genevieve, taught ballet and maybe she's still teaching ballet to some of the Palace people. I know she did to the princesses when they were little princesses.

We did a Red Cross show for the Queen. They had it in Bangkok and we screened the whole thing. And the King provided some music for it. Here again, we were associating their King and Queen with the people. And we showed that kind of stuff upcountry. In fact we had such a fine relationship that the King actually came to our screening room to edit one of the shows. And the Queen proposed me — it shouldn't have been me, it should have been Ralph — for a Red Cross medal. I had the stupid idea of writing back to the Agency and asking if I could accept it and they said no. Everybody else got medals and didn't ask, but that's the way it went.

Also, the branch PAOs played a very big part in our operations upcountry.

Q: You mentioned the branch PAOs, where did you have branch posts during your period?

GARNISH: At that time we had five branch posts. In the north, Chiang Mai; in the northeast in Ubon and Udorn; at Korat and down in the south at Songkhla. They were all

good branch officers, incidentally. And the guy who supervised them, Lloyd Burlingham, was a whale of a good officer.

Just as a sample, Gordon Murchie, who was our branch PAO up in Udorn, got wind of plans of our army — and by this time we had quite a contingent camped around Korat and other places, and also down below Songkhla. Our army was going to make a march through the mud, along with some Thai forces, to demonstrate the defenses of Thailand. This was a good idea up to a point. But if you had an army moving through the Northeast without prior knowledge, you could have had a riot there, because the resident Thais wouldn't know where they came from. They might be Laos, Cambodian, Vietnamese, or what have you.

Q: Yes, because there was quite a big North Vietnamese contingent that moved into and were living in the Northeast.

GARNISH: Yes, and I'll touch on that in a minute. But Gordon mounted a loud speaker on a Landrover and drove about 5 or 10 minutes ahead of the column, explaining its march through the area. We adapted it for other areas, too. This meant that the Thais understood before they were confronted with a delicate situation. And again, we worked very closely with JUSMAG, the Joint US Military Advisory Group.

The Vietnamese: “Circle Tour” Through Thailand

You mentioned the Vietnamese. One of the ongoing problems was that the Vietnamese communists moved into Northeast Thailand, spread around, and tried to work their stuff. Well, the Thai government eventually got an agreement with Hanoi to repatriate the Vietnamese. And so a group of them would be brought down from the Northeast to Bangkok, take ship, sail around to Hanoi, presumably to be repatriated. What I'm sure happened was that they made a complete circle and reinfiltrated through Vietnam and

Laos right back into Thailand. So we had a merry-go-round for a long time. And it made it all the more necessary to have a program to cope with that.

Ambassador Young Accidentally Gives Away USNegotiating Position on VOA Transmission Construction

One of the highlights or lowlights of my stay in Thailand had to do with the megawatt transmitter. The United States wanted to install this transmitter somewhere in Southeast Asia to broadcast into Southern China, which of course was then, as now, communist controlled, but we didn't have any relations with them then, this being from 1958 to '63 while I was there. The US tried to get India to take it and they refused. Washington turned to us and, through some lovely work by Len Robock, our radio officer, we had it pretty well established at the working level of the Thai government that they would be delighted to have it if they could get just a little share of the programming on it.

Well, Ambassador Johnson had gone by that time and Ken Young, who was a good Ambassador on the whole, came in. In this connection, at a country team meeting one morning he said, “I'm going to see Prime Minister Surit this morning. We're going to talk about economic problems and the megawatt transmitter so I'd like you (designating the Economic Counselor, and me, being the Public Affairs Officer) to accompany me to my meeting with Surit.” He was leaving in about half an hour after that meeting broke up. He said, “Howard, give me a position paper on this because I'm really not up on it.”

I rushed back to the office, didn't even make a copy, I just pounded out a rough position paper explaining that, if we handled this right, we could get just about anything we wanted because, one, at the working level, at least, the Thais wanted it. Two, they wanted some time on it. But if we played our cards right, I thought we could get the times we wanted and a major part of the time on the transmitter and give them the rest. So it was all outlined on one sheet of paper.

We rode with the Ambassador over to Surit's headquarters. There were an awful lot of economic problems to handle and so the Ambassador was busy with the Economic Counselor all the way over there and we never got to talk at all about the transmitter. As we got out of the car, he said, “Will you give me that paper?” I handed it to him. Well, they went on and on in the meeting on economic problems. It lasted the whole meeting. But Surit said something like, “We haven't talked about the transmitter,” and Ken Young, who had not read the paper, handed it to Surit. It gave away our whole position. As a result, we got the transmitter in there, but they got the prime programming.

Later on I got to talk with what's-his-name who was Ambassador there after —

Q: Was it Graham Martin?

GARNISH: Yes, Graham Martin. He was visiting in Geneva when I was back in Geneva, which is a new story. He came into my office for a chat. And he criticized the guy who had been in charge of our negotiating team for the transmitter, who was the DCM, Al Puhan. Well, since we had no position left, we didn't do a good negotiating job. I had the opportunity to set Ambassador Martin straight: that it was not Puhan's fault; it was Ken Young's.

In most respects, I think Ken Young was a good ambassador, in spite of the incident I mentioned. But he was a little bit permissive. For example, among the many entertainment groups that were sent to Thailand was Joey Adams and his troupe. Washington had put together this bunch of entertainers, and sent them pretty much around the world, I guess. But they made the mistake of making Joey Adams, who was sort of a burlesque comedian, the head of the troupe. Joey had no manners, and he couldn't operate in anything but English, so his value was very limited. The principal attractions in the troupe were Buddy Rich and his band, which eventually went to the Palace to play for the King, and what we called the balloon man, who formed all these characters just with balloons. He operated all around the hospitals of Thailand, any place we could get him. He was a great hit. But

Joey was anything but that and his wife, Cindy, was about as bad. They were fighting all the time, so we had a headache all the time they were in town.

I reported to the Ambassador on some of the problems we had with Joey, so he said, “Why don't you have him come around to the house and we'll have a little talk.” So I set it up and Joey and I got there before the Ambassador did. We went out on a balcony overlooking the grounds. It had chairs and settees, in bamboo of course, on either side of a coffee table, and a chair at the end which I occupied. Joey was over on my left. So he slouches down in his spot, puts his feet up on the coffee table and leaves them there while the Ambassador comes in. Of course it's an insult in Thailand to show the bottoms of your feet, but doing this even to an American ambassador was very bad manners. The Ambassador took it, and in fact didn't even deal with him on the subject that I had brought up. I've forgotten what that was but it was something that wasn't helping us. And that's what the troupe was there for.

We had many other troupes come in and most of them were pretty good. Jubilee Singers, I believe, was one. That was so much of interest to the King that it was arranged for him to come to our grounds in the USIS compound there —

Q: On Sathorn Road?

GARNISH: Yes, on Sathorn Road. We set up a little stage and a canopy for the King and Queen, but she didn't come that night; she was sick. We had no problem of entertaining the King because they did a good job. But when we sent them upcountry — I don't think it was that group, it was another group we sent upcountry and we had to send an officer along because the first thing they wanted was girls. And I didn't think we were in that business.

We also had a problem in southern Thailand. As you know, Thailand runs way down the Malay Peninsula with Burma on the West, beyond a ridge of mountains, and then below is Malaysia. It was Malaya at our time; it later became Malaysia. They had a communist

problem and the southern provinces in Thailand were also having one. So we paid a good deal of attention to that, working out of Songkhla.

The Legendary Jim Thompson — His Successand Unexplained Disappearance

While I was in Bangkok my wife and I became well acquainted with Jim Thompson, the American who had been with OSS during the war and jumped into Thailand, which was then under Japanese occupation and eventually stayed there to revive what had been a great Thai silk industry. Thompson had done a marvelous job with Thai silk, got good dyes and had an excellent operation. He also had a couple of stores, one of which was in the Erawan Hotel, which is fairly near both the Embassy and our office. My wife used to go over there to buy ties for me. Jim would see her, come right over and say, “Hi, Ruth, what do you want? What do you need?” “I need some ties for Howard.” Jim would look at what she had selected, say, “No, you don't want that one. I'll get you something.” And he would bring his selection back and he always was right.

Ruth was a volunteer guide at Jim Thompson's house, which was an attraction for both tourists and Thais. Jim had bought a couple of fine, old Thai-style houses upcountry, had them shipped to Bangkok and reassembled into a single beautiful, spacious structure overlooking a klong (a canal) opposite his main silk-weaving business. It was allowed to be shown at certain hours, the proceeds going to Thai charities. We enjoyed being Jim's dinner guests there, and he was often a guest at our social affairs.

In the course of time, Jim — this was after we had left — went on vacation to the Cameron Highlands in Malaya and it was there that he disappeared. Now, we've been to the Cameron Highlands and it's lovely, cool country. You can understand why it was a British hill station in the old days. It's a delightful place. But the jungle is awfully close by. And nobody knows to this day what has happened to Jim Thompson because he went out one day just to take a walk and he never came back.

Q: Just before I replaced Jack O'Brien as PAO out there I had been asked to head an inspection team in Taiwan. They said, since you're going to Taiwan, why don't you go around through Bangkok and get briefed by Jack on your way out there so you have an idea what you're getting into. And I arrived in Thailand on my way to Taiwan just four days after Jim had disappeared. Bangkok was, of course, all in a tizzy over it.

GARNISH: Oh, yes.

Q: And was for all the time that I was there as PAO.

GARNISH: That's an interesting development.

Garnish Rates USIS Counterinsurgency FieldPrograms as Very Effective

Q: I'll start by asking you how — before you leave Thailand, let me ask you a little bit about the field program which you spent some time describing earlier. How effective do you think the field program was in your day?

GARNISH: I think it was quite effective. I think, for one thing, we discovered that by revisiting some of these — not I but the teams — revisiting some of the villages that they'd been in. The villagers still talked about the team visit, they still talked about the health aspect, they still had these pictures of the King and the Buddha on their walls. Yes, I think it was quite helpful in getting the Thais to identify with Thailand.

Now, of course that's unfinished business as far as I'm concerned, and maybe you can pick up on some of that because you were there later on.

Q: Well, I of course have been interviewed and have gone into that rather extensively in my own interview so I don't want to say too much more about it now; it would simply be duplication. I felt that the program was quite effective. The insurgency had become much worse in my day because it had been going on for seven or eight years after you

left. And at that time the Chinese were actively financing the insurgency in the northeast and north. They were helping the North Vietnamese recruit people within Thailand, taking them back across into Vietnam, training them at a guerrilla training center in North Vietnam and then reinfiltrating them into Thailand. I really felt that at that time, if it had gone on that way, at least northern Thailand would have been taken over by the insurgents; that the government was losing ground all the way. It was only our rapprochement with China later on which subsequently caused the Chinese to withdraw their economic and physical support for the insurgency in the northeast that finally caused them to fade away.

But I think we were quite effective with most of the villagers except in those places where the insurgents had such a foothold that they terrorized the villages. There were several instances in which they tortured the headman in a village to death and, of course, that scared the surrounding people so that they didn't put up the kind of resistance to the insurgents that we would like to have seen. Not out of conviction; I think they were just terrified. So I do think that, where they were not too seriously opposed by tactics that we couldn't possibly emulate, it was an effective program. But Frank Shakespeare, then USIA Director, would hear none of that. He didn't think we ought to be doing it. We were doing the work for the Thai government and that ought not to be done, so turn it all over to the Thai government, which eventually was done and, of course, the whole thing simply collapsed into desuetude; nothing happened.

GARNISH: That's too bad, because I do think we were on the right track.

Q: I think we were.

GARNISH: I think Bob Lasher probably could give you more information on the setting up of these teams and so forth.

Q: Who could?

GARNISH: Bob Lasher.

Q: Oh, yes.

GARNISH: He wasn't there, I guess, in your time.

Q: He was not there with USIA. He had come back in some different capacity. I can't think exactly what it was. He touched base with us, but he then cut himself loose and went up into the northeast and we hardly ever saw him. He just disappeared into the hinterland up there and what he was doing I was never quite clear.

GARNISH: I can only be sure of one thing. He was enjoying it. He was like a Boy Scout, he was itching to get out and camp.

Q: That's right.

GARNISH: In Bangkok, our executive officer and staff provided support for our five branch posts, as well as the Bangkok operation. Otto Strohmenger was my first executive officer, followed by Russell Cox, both good men. Otto also had a No. 1 Thai who was a whiz at procurement. If you needed something — from a floor fan to a water heater or a piece of furniture, Kamol (pronounced Ca-moan) either had it or knew where to get it in a hurry. He also ordered stuff for the branch posts and lined up the drivers to deliver it. One of the items was bottled water, to save our branch officers and families from what out there was called “Bangkok belly.”

There is no doubt that Kamol was a very valuable employee, but he was not universally liked. He and a couple of high-ranking Thais in the press operation carried on a continuing feud. Most of it was petty. But eventually I heard charges that Kamol was ripping off the United States government, by instructing drivers to acquire building materials upcountry and deliver them to him. He was alleged to be building a large house from materials bought with American funds.

I felt these charges were serious, so I asked Kamol to come see me. It was a painful session, but eventually Kamol confessed that the charges were true. So I fired him. I knew it would hurt our operation, but to continue his employment would invite others to steal from the United States. Some of my officers disagreed, but the decision stood.

A few days later, returning from lunch, an envelope on my desk contained some headless Buddha images. Obviously, a curse. But I've managed to survive.

During one brief period, we had three deaths among our Thai staff. One was a heart attack, another a motorcycle accident, a third death of a driver who had failed to lash down motion picture equipment and was almost beheaded when his vehicle hit a big pothole. Some Thais came to me and asked if we could have an exorcism ceremony in the office. I assented. On the appointed morning, nine Thai Buddhist priests came, sat cross-legged along a second-story hall at our headquarters, chanted and received symbolic gifts from me and others, were fed lunch before noon (Buddhist priests do not eat after noon), and their abbot went around the offices, whisking holy water on the occupants and the furniture. The Thais were pleased and we had no more deaths.

Garnishes Leave Bangkok in 1963 —Tales of the Homeward Journey

In 1968 I had finished my tour in Thailand and we were flying home by the western route through India, Greece and so forth. So we stopped off in New Delhi and wanted to go see the Taj Mahal, among other things. Jack Stuart was then in New Delhi as press officer. John Kenneth Galbraith was the Ambassador. If you know how tall Galbraith is and how short Stuart is, like me —

Q: Pardon me. Didn't you say — a minute ago you said '68, but you must have meant '63.

GARNISH: I did. I meant '63. It was '58 to '63 that I was in Thailand. So we stayed overnight with the Stuarts. In the course of things I said, “Jack, how do you get along with

Galbraith?" He stood up his whole 5'2" or whatever, and said, "I point my finger right at his belly button and say, 'Look here, Mr. Ambassador.'"

Q: And Jack would do it, too.

GARNISH: Oh, yes. Apparently they got along quite well. Barry Zorthian and his wife were then also in Delhi. And I enjoyed seeing them.

We went on to Beirut, which was our next stop, and we enjoyed that. There was a peculiar development there. In Bangkok we had gone to the Embassy travel section asking about hotels in Beirut. One of the young fellows in the travel section said, "Oh, yes, I've been to Beirut. They've got a nice hotel there overlooking the sea, it's La Residence." So I said, "Okay, get us reservations there for the brief time we're going to be in Beirut." Well, we were on Pan Am. I had known the Pan Am guys in Bangkok and they had set it up for us to be met by a limousine in Beirut. We were duly met very early in the morning. The driver said, "Which is your hotel, Mr. Garnish?" "La Residence." And I thought he did a double take. We found out finally why. It was a brothel.

Q: I was going to say, it must have been a house of ill repute.

GARNISH: There were some of the awfullest-looking characters around there that you've ever seen, but it had two tremendous advantages. One, it did overlook the sea, and two, it had a big balcony outside our room on which we could dry our laundry. And by that time we needed that.

We went on from there to Athens where we met a couple of the people we had worked with in Thailand, Vic Stier, Roger Lydon and their wives. Vic had been my information officer. They invited us out and we had a very pleasant evening in an outdoor place, colorful, very enjoyable.

Garnish Suffers Lower Limb Paralysis in Athens

We finally got back to our hotel and the next morning about 6 o'clock I woke my wife, said, “Wake up, wake up, I'm paralyzed.” And I was. I couldn't move from the waist down. She said, “What should I do?” I said, “Get hold of the Embassy and find out what doctors they've got on their list.” An Embassy always has a list of doctors who can speak English.

She called the Embassy. A Marine Guard answered. She asked about the list. He said, “We haven't any list.” I said, “Tell him to get hold of the Duty Officer.” Reply: “We haven't any Duty Officer.” The Stiers and Lydons were going away that day so they would be up early, so I got her to call the Stiers and ask them if they knew a doctor. Yes, they did. She told them why. The doctor called an ambulance and they took me to a clinique, which was within sight of the Forum —

Q: The Acropolis?

GARNISH: The Acropolis, I mean to say. But that was the closest I got to the Acropolis. I was in there four days.

Q: Did you regain the use of your legs in that time?

GARNISH: Yes. They gave me some kind of stuff and I was able to operate. I think what had happened — we had an overnight flight from Beirut to Athens and the plane was not full. In order to get some rest I stretched out over two seats, but that arm wouldn't go down all the way. It was apparently hitting a nerve in my back. It had done a good job of paralyzing me, so much so that they couldn't take me out of the hotel down the regular elevator; they had to use the freight elevator.

Q: Surprising it didn't catch you when you first hit Athens.

GARNISH: Yes, I was perfectly fine then. We had a good time. I think I probably danced that night.

Anyway, we had ordered a car in Germany, so we got up to Frankfurt and got the car, then drove down into Italy and back through France. We arrived back home in the fall of '63. I had been overseas then since '52, 11 years. I figured I was all through traveling.

I was working in the Personnel Office temporarily and then helping Jim Tull on the Vietnam Desk. Anyway, I saw that something was coming up in Geneva that called for some good coverage and I wrote a memo saying that the Agency ought to be aware of this and outlined the background of it so that they would be able to have somebody do this.

1963: After a Short Stay in Washington —Back to Geneva for Four Years

Jerry Doster was then the Deputy Personnel Director. He got hold of me and said, “We want you to go back to Geneva.” I figured that since I had sent them that memo, they must want me to go over for that affair. I asked how long they wanted me to be there? He said, “Regular assignment.” So I had another four years in Geneva. In the meantime we had joined a country club here, never figured to go out again. So I wound up doing 16 years, almost completely consecutively, in the Foreign Service.

Between my first round there in the ''50s and my second round in the ''60s, Geneva had changed a great deal. The Mission had grown and USIS was a pretty big operation. Since Harold Kaplan was the PAO, I went back Deputy Public Affairs Adviser — a title Jerry invented.

Q: On your second time around in Geneva you said the program had grown very greatly. What was the major thrust of the operation there at that time?

GARNISH: Besides the usual conferences, we had the forever ongoing disarmament talks, which required a lot of our attention. In addition, we had the Kennedy round of GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which went on and on and on. The boss of that was Ambassador Mike Blumenthal, who later was Secretary of the Treasury. Our

ambassador heading the mission was Roger Tubby. Our staff covered the GATT meetings rather intensively.

At one stage, Blumenthal went down to Milan for a session with the Italians. Kaplan was also there in a supervisory capacity and I did the coverage. Blumenthal made a very major speech. To be sure of accuracy, I had taken along a recorder and taped his speech and used that as a basis for the story for the Wireless File and VOA. I showed my story to Kappy and it was sent.

At the end of the session we showed — I guess it was Kappy who showed the copy to Blumenthal. He exclaimed, “Kill it.” And added, “This was intended only for Italian consumption, not for the world.” I got annoyed about this because Kappy had approved it and it was perfectly accurate. I burst out, “What the hell was I brought down here for if I'm not supposed to write the story that happened?” Unfortunately, that didn't do me any good, because he reported this to Tubby and I never got the promotion which I think I deserved.

Retirement in 1970

Well, I think that covers the situation pretty well. I came back from Geneva in '68 and became retirement counselor. They tried to make me a hatchet man, which I refused. In the meantime, my health was bad, I was paralyzed pretty much and in the hospital. So in April 1970 I retired at 65.

Q: Do you think that paralysis you had at that time was a follow-on from the difficulty you had had in Athens a few years earlier?

GARNISH: They had no reason to think so. I think this, on the contrary, was probably due to the stress I had in the retirement job. Because it was a fight with the Personnel office all the time. Although I was a part of it, I had been guaranteed complete freedom to advise whatever I wished. We set up a number of seminars in cooperation with my counterpart in State, up in New York and elsewhere, and also provided individual counseling.

Q: At that time Mosley was head of Personnel, wasn't he? Or had he —

GARNISH: Yes. But he was under pressure, too.

Q: Oh, he was under pressure undoubtedly from Loomis, who in turn was under pressure from Shakespeare.

GARNISH: Shakespeare hadn't got in there at that time.

Q: '70. Yes, he had to have arrived. Because Shakespeare was in when I came back to Washington in June of 1970 and Shakespeare had already made a trip to the Far East at which time he had visited Thailand. That was when we came to our agreement to disagree.

GARNISH: In that event, he must have come in just about the time I left.

Q: He came in with the Nixon administration. Nixon was elected in '68 and was inaugurated in January of '69. Frank was named Director of the Agency about a month later. So he was the Director from fairly early in '69.

GARNISH: It could have been, but I had no association with him, anyway. Maybe it was just as well.

Q: But it was Henry Loomis who was masterminding the selection-out process.

GARNISH: Yes. That's right.

Q: Undoubtedly under orders from Shakespeare.

Final Comments

Do you have anything you want to say in retrospect about your USIA career? Any thoughts in finalizing it and analyzing what you thought about your career and how useful and how interesting it was?

GARNISH: Yes, I have. People ask me, which place did you like best? And the answer is, all of them. They were completely different posts, and different programs. Geneva was quite abnormal so far as the general direction of USIA programming is concerned, but I enjoyed all of them, perhaps because each offered a different challenge.

I've been retired almost 20 years, but developments in the past several months — from Tiananmen Square in Beijing to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union — suggest to me that we must have done something right. In spite of tremendous restraints, people got our message and many were inspired by it. I'm proud to have been part of an operation that may have contributed a little to peace and freedom.

Q: So you think, despite the fact that the wind-down was not so enjoyable, it was generally a very satisfactory way to spend your life?

GARNISH: Oh, yes. When I left the Courier Express in Buffalo, the editor assured me that I always had a job there. Any time I wanted to, I could come back. Well, I didn't come back. I think that Foreign Service was much more interesting and more important than a newspaper job. And the Courier Express is now out of business.

Q: So you might have been out of that paper even if you had stayed around for a while.

GARNISH: That's right.

Q: Thanks a great deal for giving this interview, Howard. I think especially useful is that part which dealt with the early days of OWI and some of the things that went on during the war and in the first few years after the war, because although several people have been interviewed in connection with that period, I think you've had some experiences in

it and have some viewpoint on it that I don't recall being in any of the other interviews. I have read every one of them, or else given them myself. I think it's been a very valuable contribution to this project. And thank you again for undertaking it.

GARNISH: Thanks to you, Lew, also for the intelligent questions. And of course we had a special opportunity here because you came along after Jack O'Brien who succeeded me in Thailand.

Q: Yes, we had at least one post in common.

End of interview